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New 'Wright-Site' commander steps up to the plate

by 2nd Lt. J. Elaine Hunnicutt, AFRL Public Affairs

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio — Maj. Gen. Paul D. Nielsen, Air Force Research Laboratory commander, presided over the Detachment 1 change of command May 28, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

Col. Thomas Thacker, Air Vehicles director, took command of Detachment 1 from Col. Larry Strawser, former Sensors deputy director.

The Detachment 1 or 'Wright Site' command position is an additional responsibility held by an AFRL senior military leader assigned to WPAFB; they're responsible for "taking care" of the military personnel within AFRL, and to ensure order and discipline.

Thacker will also retain his current role as director of the Air Vehicles directorate.

Strawser served as the 'Wright Site' commander for more than three years and his next assignment is at the Missile Defense Agency in Arlington, Va.

Strawser faced some unique challenges upon his arrival. This was his first assignment to the laboratory, and the detachment had recently reorganized into a single unit only 16 months prior. He relied heavily on the support of his section commanders, Maj. Chris Benedict and Capt. Rocky Favorito, and his first sergeant, Senior Master Sgt. Gary Kersen, but quickly learned and appreciated how vitally important AFRL is to ensuring the technological superiority of our Air Force, according to Strawser.

While Strawser commanded, a major goal was to build a sense of camaraderie among the many organizations within the detachment. "With a lot of help from the other senior military leaders in Detachment 1, we made great strides," said Strawser. One tool developed and used, under his command, to build that camaraderie is the detachment-wide mentoring program established for the junior military members.

In addition, many "team-building" events were organized, such as a Combat Dining Out and excursions to sporting events that brought long-time members of the AFRL community together for the first time.



Maj. Gen. Paul D. Nielsen (left), Air Force Research Laboratory commander, presided over the Detachment 1 change of command ceremony May 28. Col. Thomas Thacker (right), Air Vehicle's Directorate took command of Detachment 1 from Col. Larry Strawser (center), former Sensors Directorate deputy director. Air Force Photo by 2nd Lt. J. Elaine Hunnicutt

Thacker commended Strawser on the tremendous achievements of the detachment. He looks forward to the challenges as he steps in to fill the shoes of his predecessor.

"We are faced with significant challenges with many of the detachment personnel identified against deployment billets. We need to ensure these folks are properly trained and equipped for these crucial tasks," said Thacker.

"Plus we have the need to motivate and retain our young officers to keep their skills in the Air Force. All of this while they accomplish their normal duties as world-class researchers in the Air Force Research Laboratory," he continued.

This isn't Thacker's first time as a commander. "I hope to experience the tremendous satisfaction that occurs when your people not only do a great job but also truly enjoy their work," said Thacker.

As the Detachment 1 commander, Thacker will supervise people who don't work directly for him. "I see my job as supporting these other units to ensure all of our personnel are taken care of and that personnel issues are resolved," he said.

Even though he does not supervise many of the AFRL per-

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sonnel under his command, he encourages them to contact him or the detachment staff anytime they have a problem or concern. “We are here for them,” said Thacker.

Strawser thanked his troops during the ceremony, as he passed the torch to Thacker, “for being technological warriors for America ... for being the men and women who make America’s technological superiority possible. America needs you, now, more than ever — keep up the great work.” @